Farmers in Nebraska intend to plant some 9.2 million acres of corn this year, about 1% more than the 9.15 million they planted last year and 4.5% more than the 8.8 million planted in 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said in its Prospective Plantings report released this morning.

“If realized, acres planted to corn will be the largest since 9.4 million were planted in 2007 – and that was the most corn acres planted in Nebraska since 1936,” said Kelly Brunkhorst, the Nebraska Corn Board’s director of research.

Nationally, USDA said, corn farmers intend to plant 88.8 million acres, which is up 3% from last year’s 86.5 million. It’s also about 3% more than 2008’s plantings of 86.0 million acres. “If the weather cooperates and farmers can get moving across the country, this would be the most corn acres since 2007 when 93.6 million acres were planted,” Brunkhorst said.

At the same time corn acres were projected up, USDA said corn stocks were also high, with some 7.7 billion bushels of corn being stored in all positions across the United States as of March 1. That’s up 11% from last year.

In Nebraska, there are 906.4 million bushels in storage, which is up 12% from a year ago. Brunkhorst said 379.4 million are stored off-farm, an 18% increase, and another 560 million bushels are stored on-farm, an 8% increase.

“There is a lot of corn still in Nebraska and across the country, plenty to satisfy the demands for feed, fuel, food and fiber,” Brunkhorst said. “Over the last year farmers continued to demonstrate that with today’s technology and know-how, and their hard work, they can produce a very large crop, even with the challenges of the long harvest we’ve seen in the past year.”

Brunkhorst noted that planting intentions can change depending on weather conditions come planting time. Last year, for example, Nebraska farmers planted 400,000 more acres than what USDA had initially estimated.

“Weather plays an important role from here on out,” he said. Good planting weather will allow farmers to plant the number of acres they indicated in USDA’s survey, which was conducted the first two weeks of March. It also allows farmers to adjust acres based on market conditions and the availability of crop inputs.

“With planting intentions where they are, we’re looking at the potential for another good crop come fall,” Brunkhorst said. “As the demand for corn has grown over the last several years, it is exciting to see farmers respond, to see them produce more corn with fewer inputs like water and fertilizer. The incentive of a growing and stable market helped farmers move to the next level of innovation and sustainability.”